



My First Fish Tank

The Beginner's Guide To Saltwater Aquariums

Your First Saltwater Tank Blueprint

A guided planning tool with real totals, tank-specific electricity estimates, starter routines, setup milestones, and clear links to the guides you need.

THIS BLUEPRINT HELPS YOU LEAVE WITH:

- 1 One tank path that fits your space, budget, and goals
- 2 Startup low and high totals you can actually see
- 3 An editable electricity estimate for the first year
- 4 A step-by-step setup map and a useful cycling record
- 5 A starter maintenance routine and an emergency plan
- 6 One summary page showing what is decided and what still needs work

Best fillable experience: Adobe Acrobat Reader

Browser and phone viewers may show fields but not recalculate totals. Every calculator includes a manual fallback.

Start with the tank you actually want

This is not a quiz with one perfect answer. It is a fast way to make the important tradeoffs visible before you buy anything.

Animals I care about most fish, coral, anemone, or still deciding

Where the tank will live room and exact spot

My comfortable first-year range a range, not one perfect number

Time I can give it each week be honest

My non-negotiables

☐ quiet

☐ small footprint

☐

☐

My one-sentence tank brief

Example: I want a quiet 15-gallon reef in my office with clownfish, easy corals, and enough guidance that I do not have to guess my way through setup.



Start Here: make the big decisions first

myfirstfishtank.com/start-here/

Make sure the location works before the tank is full

Check each item. If any answer is unknown, that is the next thing to solve - not a reason to guess.

	WORKS	CHANGE	CHECK
1 The tank and stand fit with room to reach the back and sides Measure the actual footprint.	☐	☐	☐
2 The support is designed for the aquarium's filled weight Water alone weighs about 8.34 lb per gallon.	☐	☐	☐
3 There is a safe outlet and drip-loop plan Get qualified help if electrical safety is unclear.	☐	☐	☐
4 Direct sun, vents, heaters, and cold windows are not a problem Think about the room in every season.	☐	☐	☐
5 I can carry water to the tank and clean around it Maintenance access matters every week.	☐	☐	☐
6 Noise, children, pets, traffic, and travel have a plan The best spot must also work day to day.	☐	☐	☐
LOCATION DECISION	Works / change / check		

Compare the three beginner tank paths

These are not the only tanks in the world. They are the three paths My First Fish Tank can support most clearly right now.



Scan for the complete, current three-build comparison

myfirstfishtank.com/build-lists/

Eshopps DeskMate 4.8

Smallest footprint

4.8 gal

GEAR INCLUDED

AIO tank, return pump, light and the current bundle supplies

PLANNING RANGE

\$350-\$700 first year

ELECTRICITY

\$25-\$45 per year at the default rate

BEST FOR

Tiny reef; best for coral and invertebrates

WATCH FOR

Very little room for mistakes

HelloReef 15

Deepest guidance

15 gal

GEAR INCLUDED

AIO tank, light, pumps, heater, lid, supplies and the full course

PLANNING RANGE

\$850-\$1,500 first year

ELECTRICITY

\$55-\$85 per year at the default rate

BEST FOR

A guided first reef with a simple livestock plan

WATCH FOR

Stand and livestock still add cost

JBJ RF-45

More room to grow

45 gal

GEAR INCLUDED

AIO aquarium, stand and dual return pumps

PLANNING RANGE

\$2,200-\$4,000 first year

ELECTRICITY

\$150-\$260 per year at the default rate

BEST FOR

More water volume and livestock flexibility

WATCH FOR

Light, heater and flow are separate choices

Planning ranges are intentionally broad. Prices, package contents, livestock, room temperature, and optional upgrades change the result. Use the QR code for current product details before buying.

Choose a path - and write down why

A written reason makes it easier to notice when the package, location, price, or animal goal no longer fits.

☐	DeskMate 4.8	Tiny reef; coral and invertebrates
☐	HelloReef 15	Most step-by-step guidance
☐	JBJ RF-45	More room and more equipment
☐	Another tank	Compare it using the same checks
☐	Wait	Solve the missing information first

Why this path fits me

Exact model or package name

What is included

Current public price

What is still missing

Date I checked it

What could make me pause

WHY HELLOREEF HAS THE DEEPEST GUIDANCE

I, along with my team at Aperture, created the HelloReef course. I created the course videos, and I can confirm that the complete course includes more than 50 videos. This Blueprint gives you a useful public overview, but it does not reproduce the private course included with the kit.

BEFORE-BUY VERDICT

Continue / answer a question / wait

What will it take to get this tank started?

Use a low and a high number for every category. The totals at the bottom show the range - not just a pile of disconnected blanks.

CATEGORY AND WHAT BELONGS HERE	LOW	HIGH
Tank or kit Current exact package		
Stand or safe support Only if the location needs it		
Required equipment not included Light, heater, flow, lid, ATO, or other essentials		
Rock, sand, salt, and water Initial setup materials		
Testing and calibration Tests, refractometer, and calibration fluids		
Safety and backup basics Power strip, leak plan, basic backup		
First livestock and food Do not buy this early		
Contingency A real buffer for something you missed		
TOTAL LOW PRICE 0.00	TOTAL HIGH PRICE 0.00	

Manual fallback: add each LOW column and each HIGH column. Do not include optional future upgrades in the required startup total.

Estimate electricity without starting from nothing

Choose the closest tank baseline, adjust the electricity rate, and replace the planning assumptions if your actual equipment is different.

EDITABLE ELECTRICITY RATE

Default electricity rate: 17.30 cents/kWh, the 2025 U.S. residential annual average reported by the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

CENTS PER kWh

ROOM TEMP (F)

TANK TEMP (F)

☐ DeskMate 4.8

Baseline at 72 F room / 78 F tank: 135 kWh/year

5W pump + 7W light for 10 hr/day + 25W heater

ESTIMATED YEARLY COST

☐ HelloReef 15

Baseline at 72 F room / 78 F tank: 284 kWh/year

9W pumps/flow + 20W light for 10 hr/day + 50W heater

ESTIMATED YEARLY COST

☐ JBJ RF-45

Baseline at 72 F room / 78 F tank: 1,028 kWh/year

Two 16W returns + 60W light for 10 hr/day + 15W flow + 150W heater

ESTIMATED YEARLY COST

WHY THIS IS AN ESTIMATE

Room temperature changes heater runtime. This calculator raises the estimate as the room gets colder and uses a planning cap - it is not a utility bill prediction. Lid use, airflow, season, light settings, and actual equipment also matter.

Manual fallback: baseline annual kWh x electricity rate in cents / 100 = annual cost

What will the first year probably cost?

Bring the startup range forward, add one year of ongoing costs, and keep optional upgrades separate so the real decision stays visible.

FIRST-YEAR COST CATEGORY	LOW	HIGH
Startup total Bring forward the totals from the previous page		
Electricity Use the selected estimate or your adjusted equipment estimate		
Salt, water, and replacement media A full year		
Food, testing refills, and routine supplies A full year		
Livestock Use a conservative range and do not rush it		
Replacement or backup items A realistic buffer		

FIRST-YEAR TOTAL - LOW	0.00	FIRST-YEAR TOTAL - HIGH	0.00
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OPTIONAL UPGRADES - ONLY IF THEY SOLVE A REAL PROBLEM

☐ DC wavemaker	Cost	☐ DC return pump	Cost
☐ Temperature controller	Cost	☐ Auto top-off	Cost
☐ Battery backup	Cost	☐ Monitoring or controller	Cost

Use an affiliate link only when the product is genuinely useful for the chosen tank. Do not add upgrades just because they exist.

MY DECISION

See what the package includes - and what you still need

Choose the closest path. Check the current package before buying because prices and bundle contents can change.

☐ DeskMate 4.8

PACKAGE STARTING POINT

Current bundle starts with the AIO tank, return pump, light and setup supplies.

PLAN TO ADD OR CONFIRM

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Heater | ☐ Safe power setup |
| ☐ Thermometer | ☐ Maintenance tools |
| ☐ Testing and calibration | |

Optional item I may add later

☐ HelloReef 15

PACKAGE STARTING POINT

Current kit starts with the AIO tank, light, pumps, heater, lid, supplies and the complete course.

PLAN TO ADD OR CONFIRM

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Safe stand or support | ☐ Maintenance tools |
| ☐ RO/DI water plan | ☐ Livestock and food |
| ☐ Testing refills | |

Optional item I may add later

☐ JBJ RF-45

PACKAGE STARTING POINT

Current package starts with the AIO aquarium, stand and dual return pumps.

PLAN TO ADD OR CONFIRM

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Reef light | ☐ Testing and setup supplies |
| ☐ Heater | ☐ Lid if needed |
| ☐ Wavemaker or flow plan | |

Optional item I may add later

COMPANION SHOPPING LISTS - SEPARATE DOWNLOADS

[DeskMate 4.8 suggested buy list](#) | [HelloReef 15 suggested buy list](#) | [JBJ RF-45 suggested buy list](#)

Those separate PDFs can use reviewed affiliate links without turning this planning page into a wall of sales links.

Use a setup roadmap with a clear definition of done

You are not writing random notes next to 'water' or 'sand.' Each milestone tells you what finished actually means.



Open the setup guide hub before you begin

myfirstfishtank.com/saltwater-tank-setup/

1	Location ready Tank fits, support is appropriate, maintenance access and power plan checked.	☐ COMPLETE Note
2	Exact package checked Current contents, missing equipment, price, and return policy recorded.	☐ COMPLETE Note
3	Tank assembled safely Stand level, tank placed, cords planned, no damage or obvious leak concern.	☐ COMPLETE Note
4	Saltwater and aquascape ready Water source, salt, salinity, rock, sand, and mixing plan understood.	☐ COMPLETE Note
5	Temperature and flow working Equipment runs normally and the tank is holding the intended conditions.	☐ COMPLETE Note
6	Cycle and testing underway Test method understood, dates recorded, results beginning to form a pattern.	☐ COMPLETE Note
7	First animal research started Exact species researched; purchase still waits for the evidence.	☐ COMPLETE Note

Track the cycle so you can see a pattern

Use the same test method consistently and record dates, results, salinity, temperature, and what you noticed. A calendar alone does not prove readiness.



Use the complete water-testing guide

myfirstfishtank.com/saltwater-aquarium-water-testing/

DATE	AMMONIA	NITRITE	NITRATE	SALINITY	TEMP	WHAT I NOTICED

USE THE LOG TO ASK BETTER QUESTIONS

Do the results make sense together? Are temperature and salinity steady? Is the equipment behaving normally? If not, repeat the test carefully, check the instructions, and wait before adding livestock.

Research the animals before you buy them

Start with three serious candidates, not a store aisle full of possibilities. Adult size, behavior, diet, and tank fit matter more than how good the animal looks today.



Open the Livestock Guide before making the shortlist

myfirstfishtank.com/livestock-guides/

1

Animal or exact species

Source and date checked

Adult size / space

Behavior / compatibility

Diet / care

2

Animal or exact species

Source and date checked

Adult size / space

Behavior / compatibility

Diet / care

3

Animal or exact species

Source and date checked

Adult size / space

Behavior / compatibility

Diet / care

SHORTLIST DECISION

Research more / one candidate fits / wait

Put the animals in a sensible order - or wait

The first animal changes the choices that come after it. Write the reason for the order and the point where you will stop if the research does not line up.



Review compatibility and stocking order first

myfirstfishtank.com/saltwater-fish-compatibility-stocking-order/

FIRST

Why is this the best first addition?

Animal

Reason

LATER

What needs to be true before this one?

Animal

Reason

ALTERNATE

What is the simpler fallback choice?

Animal

Reason

WAIT

What unanswered question stops the purchase?

Animal

Reason

Start with a routine you can actually keep

You should not have to invent maintenance from a blank page. Begin with this simple rhythm, then change it for the equipment and animals you actually own.



Open the complete Maintenance Guide

myfirstfishtank.com/maintenance-guides/

DAILY - 1 TO 3 MINUTES

- ☐ Look at the animals and water
- ☐ Check temperature and equipment sounds
- ☐ Top off manually if no ATO

My adjustment

WEEKLY

- ☐ Clean the glass as needed
- ☐ Review salinity and the tests appropriate for this stage
- ☐ Check filter material and water level

My adjustment

WATER-CHANGE DAY

- ☐ Mix and match temperature/salinity
- ☐ Change water and remove visible debris
- ☐ Inspect the rear chamber or sump

My adjustment

MONTHLY / LONGER TERM

- ☐ Clean pumps and inspect moving parts
- ☐ Replace media by condition and instructions
- ☐ Review backup supplies and travel plan

My adjustment

ROUTINE DECISION

Sustainable / simplify / wait

Write the backup plan before you need it

The useful parts are prebuilt. Fill in only the contacts, equipment locations, and safe shutoff details that are specific to your home.



Use the full power-outage and vacation guide

myfirstfishtank.com/aquarium-power-outage-vacation-plan/

POWER OUTAGE

Protect oxygen and safe water movement first. Follow the current instructions for the backup equipment you actually own.

Backup equipment and location

VACATION

Use a simple written routine, pre-portioned food, and a person who can reach you. Avoid big last-minute changes.

Helper, phone, and check schedule

LEAK OR OVERFLOW

Keep people away from electrical risk. Know the safe shutoff and who to call before moving equipment.

Safe shutoff and contact

ANIMAL LOOKS WRONG

Start with observation and water quality. Record what changed. Do not guess at a medication from one symptom.

Observation and help route

STOP for electrical, fire, structural, flooding, chemical, or significant animal-health risk. This workbook does not diagnose disease or choose medication. Use current label directions and qualified veterinary help when treatment decisions require it.

Your plan on one page

Bring forward the decisions that matter. If a field is blank, that is not failure - it is the next question to answer.

MY TANK PATH

DeskMate / HelloReef / JBJ / another / wait

LOCATION

Works / needs changes / not ready

STARTUP TOTAL

Low - high

ANNUAL ELECTRICITY

Selected estimate

FIRST-YEAR TOTAL

Low - high

NEXT PUBLIC GUIDE

The exact next guide

THE QUESTIONS I STILL NEED TO ANSWER

MY NEXT THREE USEFUL ACTIONS

1

Action

Date

2

Action

Date

3

Action

Date